

## **Elijah Parish Lovejoy**

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On November 9, 1802, a gifted child named Elijah Parish Lovejoy was born. He changed the history of journalism in Alton, Illinois, and in America. Growing up with a minister for their father, Elijah and his siblings were taught to believe that it was their duty to help eliminate sin from the world. Never wavering in his teachings, Lovejoy grew up to become a man who highly valued the lessons he was taught and used his knowledge to graduate from Waterville College in Maine, a Baptist Institution that held beliefs identical to the Lovejoy family.

After graduating in 1826, Lovejoy decided that he could best serve God by moving west to help others. He settled in St. Louis, Missouri, and started his own private high school. After many successful years as a schoolteacher, Lovejoy resigned to become a partner in publishing the *St. Louis Times*, a political newspaper that supported Henry Clay, a senator from Kentucky who thought slavery was sinful. Along with publishing the *St. Louis Times*, Elijah campaigned for the Missouri and Illinois Tract Society, an organization that aimed to help young people attend church regularly.

In 1832 Reverend David Nelson arrived in St. Louis and managed to persuade Elijah to leave the political newspaper business. After listening to Reverend Nelson's sermons, Lovejoy made the decision to enter the Princeton Theological Seminary. He finished school early, receiving the right to preach from the Presbytery of Philadelphia on April 18, 1833. Before moving west, Elijah was offered several editorial jobs by

Presbyterians in St. Louis. He spent most of his days delivering sermons, but also edited a reform newspaper, the *Observer*.

This newspaper received unkind responses as a result of the remarks in it about the Catholic Church and its beliefs on slavery. Lovejoy, usually quiet on the subject of slavery, began speaking about the issue. Knowing that slaveholders in the South were not about to give up their slaves, Elijah started his own campaign against slavery. As a result of his editorials and anti-slavery views, he and his newspaper were threatened with violence. By the summer of 1835, slaveholders and other Missouri men considered Lovejoy to be a menace. Angry mobs from St. Louis tracked down Lovejoy, but he often escaped. Fearlessly, he wrote editorials about freedom of the press guaranteed to him by the Constitution of the United States.

However, in May 1836, town meetings and violence caused Lovejoy to decide to move across the Mississippi River to Alton into the free state of Illinois. The citizens of Alton welcomed Lovejoy and the *Observer* with open arms because they believed that a religious newspaper would help the city's reputation. Knowing that Lovejoy was a controversial figure in St. Louis, the people of Alton made him promise that his presence would not be a problem in their peaceful town.

However, Lovejoy continued to speak against slavery, writing that all Christians should work for the destruction of slavery. For many months Elijah continued to write his thoughts and opinions on slavery. The Alton citizens saw Lovejoy as an abolitionist and became fearful of him transforming their town into an abolitionist center. He soon organized a meeting of a state anti-slavery society at one of the Presbyterian churches in

Alton. Discussed in the meeting were the issues of Lovejoy's editorials against slavery and the feeling of betrayal felt by the Alton citizens.

Lovejoy had pushed some people in Alton to the brink. On August 21, 1837, large crowds began to appear outside of the *Observer* office. A mob broke into the office and began tearing apart the printing press, throwing it into the Mississippi River. However, Elijah was not threatened and continued speaking and writing about his beliefs. The mob struck a second time, ruining another printing press. Lovejoy then asked his subscribers for \$1500 to order a third press. The money came, and he ordered another press. But violence and damage continued, causing Elijah to order four new presses.

Soon after, Lovejoy traveled to Jacksonville to visit his friend, the president of Illinois College. They decided on August 15, 1837 that an anti-slavery convention would be held on October 26 in Alton.

When another meeting was held in November 1837 in Alton, the citizens proposed the idea of Lovejoy and the *Observer* leaving Alton. Knowing that the people wanted him gone, Elijah responded by saying "Sir, I dare not flee away from Alton." Most people knew that Lovejoy would not leave their town easily. That evening a large brick flew through Lovejoy's window, barely missing him.

On Tuesday November 7, 1837, the new printing press arrived and was placed in the office. After hearing of the arrival of the press, the citizens prepared to take action. That evening the men of Alton threatened to burn his office if Lovejoy did not give up the press. The mob threw stones, shot pistols, and climbed a ladder to set the roof on fire. Lovejoy and one of his followers took the chance of pushing over the ladder. As the ladder was being pushed, shots were fired and Lovejoy was hit and killed.

Elijah was hit trying to save his press. He was buried a day later on his thirty-fifth birthday. [From *Alton Observer*. Nov. 7, 1837,  
<<http://www.altonweb.com/history/lovejoy/aol.html>> (Dec. 1, 2004); “African American Registry,” <[http://www.aaregistry.com/african\\_american\\_history/1471/Elijah\\_Lovejoy\\_abolitionist\\_publisher](http://www.aaregistry.com/african_american_history/1471/Elijah_Lovejoy_abolitionist_publisher)> (Dec. 13, 2004); Allan Carpenter, *Illinois Land of Lincoln*. Chicago, IL: Regensteiner Publishing Enterprises Inc., 1968; Kiara Hickman, “Elijah Parish Lovejoy,” <[http://pphsp.uis.edu/elijah\\_parish\\_lovejoy.htm](http://pphsp.uis.edu/elijah_parish_lovejoy.htm)> (Dec. 2, 2004). John Simkin, “Elijah Lovejoy,” <<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASlovejoy.htm>> (Dec. 15, 2004); Paul Simon, *Freedom’s Champion, Elijah Lovejoy*. ]